

## check chat

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## check chat

by [TrashcanWithSprinkles](#)

### Summary

In which a hundred of them wake up inside Minecraft and George is all alone.

### Notes

you know the jig by know, don't shove this down their throats or i'll rip yours. respect them please.

anyway take this from me please i don't know why i wrote it i hope you enjoy it also i'm the same fuck who wrote local brewery if that rings any bells, so you know kinda

what you'll find here.

also also i've already pretty much written this entire thing so the next chapters should be up in like no time.

oh and the asterisks (\*\*\*) signal a change of POV fyi

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

## the spawn

George spawned on an island. Alone. There was one patch of sugarcanes, three poppies, a birch tree, an oak tree, and no caves.

It was, perhaps, both the best and worst possible spawn he could've had, given the situation.

Because, well,

George spent the first two hours of his life in the game trying to come to terms with the fact that he was, as a matter of fact, inside Minecraft.

He didn't cry. He wasn't scared, at first. He wasn't upset. He wasn't worried at first, either.

He was just...

Well, it was a very hard pill to swallow. A big chunk of those two hours were spent pinching the bridge of his nose and asking himself in the most disappointed tone possible,

*Deadass?*

\*\*\*

Dream spawned in a plains biome with Sapnap right by his side and almost fifty other players around them. There was a general confusion at first, but since they were many and they were all apparently experienced enough in the game nobody was really *scared* for the time being.

So most of the first hour was spent coming to terms with reality while trying not to ask why or how.

Once everyone had been capable of forming coherent thoughts again, they began testing things to get more familiarized with this new real Minecraft they were in.

There were several things they discovered by merely tinkering with... well, themselves.

Tab, chat, F3, and the inventory could all be accessed *telepathically*, for lack of a better word – although they couldn't type anything in the chat so it would only serve as an announcement board of sorts. Tab showed they were a hundred players total, and they had all joined at the same time. Tab also confirmed exactly half of them were present there at the moment, meaning there were fifty other players out there somewhere.

Dream discovered with a mix of delight, disappointment, and worry (in that order) that George was one of them.

They took a good look at themselves: everyone was wearing something resembling their in-game skins. For those who had human-like skins, they were simply wearing their skins' clothes. There

were some exceptions, of course; like how Bad didn't have a diamond sword strapped to his back. But, for the most part, you could tell it was the same thing their skins had been wearing. Sapnap kept his bandana, Tommy had his white and red tee, Eret kept his shades, etc.

That last observation made Dream wonder if George had spawned with his clout goggles, too.

Not everyone had human-like skins, however. For those with amorphous skins like he himself, it seemed they had kept some traits related to their skins and obtained a simple hoodie matching their colors. Dream, as many others, had a paper plate mask on his face; although he was in the few that chose to wear it as intended instead of shifting it to the side of his head. His hoodie was the same green as his skin, and he was so very relieved to know he hadn't spawned with full-body neon green thighs like he'd kind of dreaded to. Skeppy was in much the same situation as him, as were Finnster and TapL.

There were outliers to this. They discovered quick that animal-based skins received a different treatment, for some goddamned reason. It was easy enough to discover Fundy and SeaPeeKay in the crowd, given they both had fox masks; and Technoblade also stood out like a sore thumb with his pig mask *and* his crown. For some reason, though, Xisuma's strider skin had fallen in this category.

Clearly, whoever translated their skins was a coward, because while Fundy could be excused due to the rest of his skin being normal clothes, Callum couldn't and he *should* have gotten a fursuit.

Guess the fox onesie he had now would have to work.

\*\*\*

It was midday and George was just starting to get a feel for how everything worked when the first announcement appeared on chat.

*Ph1LzA has made the advancement [Stone Age].*

Which was immediately followed by a stream of similar announcements.

*WilburSoot has made the advancement [Stone Age].*

*SalC1 has made the advancement [Stone Age].*

*Purpled has made the advancement [Stone Age].*

*TommyInnit has made the advancement [Stone Age].*

*Skeppy has made the advancement [Stone Age].*

*Dream has made the advancement [Stone Age].*

*Philza has made the advancement [Getting an Upgrade].*

*BadBoyHalo has made the advancement [Stone Age].*

George wondered, as the announcements continued to roll in, if maybe a bunch of them had spawned together.

Which, by contrast, made his isolated spawn suddenly not as good as he thought it was.

*Dream has made the advancement [Getting an Upgrade].*

George sighed and took another swing of his wooden pickaxe at the stone.

*GeorgeNotFound has made the advancement [Stone Age].*

\*\*\*

Armed with stone swords, stone axes, and several stacks of cobblestone among them fifty, they decided to trust Tubbo and Sal and head for zero-zero. The reasoning was sound: they were only like a hundred blocks away from it, and if any of the other players decided to search for them it would be the only place where *everyone* would agree it was likely to be an option, even if they knew there was no guarantee they would all think of it. There were no major set landmarks in Minecraft, and sharing coords in chat was impossible; thus the center of the world was the only place that would never change when it came to its location.

And it proved to be a good idea, too, because only three hours after having made it to zero-zero (marked by a big oak tree in the same plains biome they'd spawned in) they spotted the first batch of arrivals to the group: Fit, Callahan, and Sylvee, coming in from the north. According to them, it was by pure coincidence they had found each other, having all spawned on their own; and it had been Fit's idea to head for zero-zero.

The construction team led by Grian, Eret, and Philza was halfway through setting up walls around zero-zero for their base when another player arrived, this one from the west.

Half an hour after that and with the sun setting in the horizon, another player arrived.

"That's five that have all spawned alone," Skeppy commented as they sat around campfires within the walls. According to the ones in charge of the building team, however, they had rushed it to

make a perimeter before nightfall and would continue building them higher and fortifying them tomorrow.

"Why would all fifty of us spawn together?" Sapnap questioned, confused. "You'd think we'd either spawn separated or all together, not... some on their own and some in a big group."

"Do you think perhaps it's been split in half?" Wilbur began, twirling a stick in his fingers.

"What do you mean?" Sapnap turned to him.

"That half of us ended up in a big group and the other half is spread out across the world all on their own."

There was silence to that.

"I hope not," Bad mumbled, worried. "What are they going to do alone in the middle of nowhere with all the mobs?"

Nighttime had officially begun, and with it came an announcement that was so ominous an omen nobody really believed it for a moment.

*Jhon\_34 was blown up by a creeper.*

\*\*\*

George looked up at the dark sky out his window and tried not to think about the death announcements rolling in in a corner of his vision, allowing himself to check the names only to make sure he didn't recognize any. If he had to guess, respawning was not a feature; although he didn't want to test it, either.

Tab showed the list of names had gone down from a hundred, to ninety-six. Meaning respawning was, in fact, not an option.

His spawn island was small, clear of any obstacles now that he'd cut down the trees and the saplings had yet to grow. He'd made himself a stone fort and torchgrid the island's surface.

As he found out while digging for stone, there was a cave system underneath it that thankfully didn't have any entrances to the island save for the two-by-two hole he'd made.

He hadn't patched it, as a matter of fact. He was sitting inside his fort, looking intently out the window towards the spot he'd marked as the entrance to what he'd at first assumed would be his strip mine.

George was playing it safe. He was alone in the island with no food and no guarantee he would find mainland before perishing at sea if he attempted to set sail. He didn't have string for a fishing rod, and he'd spent most of the day figuring out his bearings and making a fort to survive the night. Tomorrow he'd catch fish or cut kale, he told himself.

For now, he had some iron smelting in the furnaces at his back and a tight grip on his stone axe.

He was waiting. Waiting for a mob to crawl out of the entrance of his mine. He was nervous, of course he was; but he knew he would have to get used to killing mobs as soon as possible if he wanted any chances at survival.

*GeorgeNotFound has made the advancement [Acquire Hardware].*

\*\*\*

*GeorgeNotFound has made the advancement [Monster Hunter].*

The announcement in the chat left everyone at the base in shock. It was the first of its kind to appear, and it had been preceded by three other deaths after the initial one.

Dream couldn't help but smile in relief, glad to know that George's next announcement in the chat hadn't been his death. Those around him who knew the other man also seemed to relax a little at the knowledge that, not only had he not died yet, but he'd also managed to take down and survive whatever was chasing him.

Dream almost felt proud.

George was alone, but he was smart and strong. He knew his way around the game, and--

*GeorgeNotFound has made the advancement [Suit Up].*

Dream's smile widened.

He was somehow already ahead of them, even if they, too, had a couple pieces of iron smelting in the furnaces that they'd found while mining up stone for the walls.

He supposed it was easier to provide for a single person than it was for a whole group of fifty-five.

\*\*\*

With a shield now next to his door and his new iron boots on, George sat on the grass within his fort and examined the loot he'd obtained from maiming that spider to death.

A single spider eye and some string.

Which annoyed him.

It hadn't been easy, and he'd been honestly afraid as he lifted his axe and downed it on the giant, gangly, *terrifying* spider's abdomen before it could jump at him. He'd been panicking as it wiggled on the ground, not dead yet, and he chopped down once more, sending a gross black sludge splattering across the grass.

It was the third hit what killed it, and the spider had poofed out of existence along with the sludge and left only experience orbs and the aforementioned loot items.

And George was disappointed, angry, and feeling scammed.

In his mind he wanted it to make sense. That's how it was in-game, after all. He should be counting himself lucky of even getting the eye, considering it hadn't been a cave spider.

But he just couldn't make sense of it. It was one thing seeing it through a computer, and it was another entirely different holding the axe in hands clammy from the chill of the night and jittery from the fear of 'what if's as he slammed it down a huge monster that just. wouldn't. die.

And to only get a single eye out of the eight that *thing* had?

It pissed George off.

If only the spider hadn't poofed out of existence, then he could've looted the corpse himself and gotten way better things out of it. This might be Minecraft, but there were no game mechanics preventing him from just... making stuff.

A quick glance at the makeshift spear sitting to the side was enough to reassure him of that. He'd *made* that spear, with a sharp stone at the tip and sticks for a body. It was the reason why he didn't have a fishing rod: he'd used the string he'd collected from the cobweb he found in the cave system (implying there was a mineshaft nearby) to tie the spear together.

He'd made it earlier that day while looking at the sea during one of his thought lapsus in which he'd forget this was Minecraft and not just real life.

He'd made a fishing spear.

He hadn't crafted it in the crafting table, and there was no recipe for it.



But he'd made it.

Because there was no code stopping him from it.

So, if the spider hadn't poofed into nothingness, he could've gotten better stuff. But there was nothing he could do about it, was there? It was probably a rule of this world that entities would poof out of existence upon dying, much like how stone would drop into cobble and torches and campfires burned forever.

So long as he was killing mobs, he was making the rest of the loot disappear.

...

And that's when he had the thought,

...that he could loot *before* killing them.

\*\*\*

It was midnight and the base had yet to fall asleep. They had settled watch turns to look out for the spiders that would climb the walls every so often, but so far none of the people who were supposed to be trying to rest was... well, resting. Either they were too overwhelmed with the situation to shut their thoughts up for long enough to sleep, or the occasional commotion from a spider climbing the walls and half the guards rushing to kill it was keeping them awake.

Most of everyone in guard duty had followed after George in getting that advancement, and Dream had newfound respect for his friend.

Mobs were terrifying. He couldn't imagine having to convince himself to fight one all on his own, with no help in sight.

Everytime one spider disappeared in a puff of white particles, the base let out a collective sigh of relief.

At the very least they were getting some string for some bows or fishing rods.

"Is that the fifteenth?" Sapnap at his side asked, sword in hand. They had been glad to discover the sludge disappeared along with the mobs, else they would have a problem with how much of the stuff ended up in everyone's clothes during fights.

"Sixteenth," Dream corrected with a huff, tired.

"We're gonna have to make a roof as soon as we can," Techno commented from the side, looking up at the sky. "If these are the spiders, I *do not* want to see the phantoms. I don't want a repeat of

VR."

"Duly noted," Eret mused, alert.

Silence returned to the base once more, those lying on the grass shuffling to try and sleep.

And then,

*GeorgeNotFound has made the advancement [Cruel Effectiveness].*

Those who had been trying to sleep stopped trying altogether as everyone in the base looked at the chat in absolute confusion.

"'Cruel Effectiveness', what's that?" Tommy asked from where he was sitting by a campfire, looking at his own chat.

"That was not in before, was it?" Techno sounded genuinely confused.

"No, I don't think so," Skeppy shook his head no.

"It wasn't," Philza confirmed, serious. "I think we can still read the descriptions, hold on..."

There was silence for a moment as they all fiddled with this dumb telepathy thing to try and open the description of the advancement.

Philza beat them to it.

"It says 'Fully loot a mob. Does this count as torture?'," he read. "What...?"

"What does that even mean??" Tommy insisted.

"Did he get a Looting sword from one of those new Nether portal ruins in the overworld?" Wilbur questioned, baffled.

"What- You can get Looting from those?" Dream asked, surprised. He hadn't been following the news up to the release of 1.16 all that closely, and considering they woke up here the day the update was supposed to drop, he never got to play it.

"It's in the loot tables for the chests they spawn with, yeah," Xisuma nodded. "But I don't remember an advancement being added for using a weapon with Looting on it."

"I take it you don't remember this advancement at all, then," Techno hummed, and Xisuma nodded to that. "Then what is this guy doing?"

Nobody had an answer to that, and the attention of the group was pulled back to a spider trying to climb their wall.

Seeing the others go take care of it, Dream let himself look back at the chat.

What was George doing?

\*\*\*

George discovered several things throughout the night.

Not only could he *make* things that didn't previously exist in the game, but doing certain things a different way was even rewarded with advancements.

So it wasn't that he'd made a fishing spear despite the game not having it as an item, but more so that he was exploring the new 'mechanics', so to speak.

He also found out his clout goggles worked the same way a carved pumpkin did with endermen: they wouldn't aggro. He made the mistake of looking at one that teleported up from the mineshaft, and was too shocked by its appearance that he forgot he had to look away.

But nothing happened.

And so the enderman was now chilling with him on the island; which was unnerving, but George supposed there was nothing he could do about it, now. It kind of felt wrong to kill it by that point, even worse if the Nether was the New Nether and he could get pearls from bartering instead.

Sitting on the beach of the tiny island under the morning sun, George took a moment to catch up on all the announcements he'd slept through.

A total of fourteen people had died throughout the night, dropping the overall player population down to eighty-six. George didn't recognize any of the names, and spent a solemn minute in silence for those who'd already died.

Sadly, he wasn't surprised by the deaths. Actually, he was – but because of how *few* there had been in the first night. Unless a big chunk of them had spawned in groups or had managed to find others, dying on the first night sounded very likely to George. Mobs seemed to have started spawning as soon as the world generated, going by how he'd heard the spiders' hisses echo in the cave system as he'd explored it during daytime yesterday. He was just lucky to have spawned somewhere he couldn't be blindsided by mobs. The island was stupid small, and there had been no shade on it as soon as he'd taken down the trees. The cave system underground didn't have a direct access to the surface until he made a hole into it by accident.

So mobs literally couldn't spawn on his island now that he'd also lit it up.

All things considered, aside from his complete isolation from the rest of the world, he'd been *very*

lucky with his spawn.

Aside from all that, most players seemed to have already killed their first mob, which was good.

As his stomach grumbled, he remembered the next thing on his 'survive' list was getting food.

Fishing with a spear confirmed something George had started suspecting when he killed the first spider: your skill at the game somewhat translated to what he was capable of doing now. There was no way he would've been able to kill that thing with a heavy stone axe back in the real world, and he was good using axes in-game.

Diving into the clear waters off the coast of his island, spear in hand, wouldn't have been nearly as easy. There was no way he would've been able to so smoothly skewer a fish, first try.

When he broke through the surface of the water, he turned his attention to the new announcement in chat:

*GeorgeNotFound has made the advancement [Tactical Fishing].*

Confused, he checked the advancement's description the same way he'd done yesterday night after extracting all eight eyes out of the still-wiggling, sludge-covered spider.

*"Catch a fish without a fishing rod."*

Tactical Fishing used to be the advancement for getting a bucket of some fish. He supposed, if he was allowed to do whatever he wanted, then the description being changed to fit other forms of fishing confirmed his theory.

This wasn't the Minecraft they knew.

Not entirely, at least.

\*\*\*

"I can't believe Georgie's got armor *and* a bucket already and we don't even have shields yet," Sapnap mock-complained, reading the latest advancement.

"We literally have fifty-four more people to provide for than him," Dream deadpanned.

"Fifty-seven," Sapnap corrected, and Dream clicked his tongue. Right, three other players had managed to get to zero-zero by sunrise that morning, booting their numbers up to fifty-eight.

"Shut up and keep mining," he simply sighed, to which the other chuckled but complied.

Their progress was slow but steady, strip-mining on the same hole the others had made the previous day while gathering stone for the walls of the base. The group was currently split into several small parties all busy gathering cobblestone for the construction of the base's roof and searching for iron at the same time. They had plenty smelting back up in the surface, but a couple of stacks was nothing to a group of over fifty people if it took around twenty-four iron ingots to make a full suit of armor. And only armor, tools and weapons and shields and other appliances not accounted for.

So it was going to take them a while before they were all decked out and ready to tackle the new Nether.

Xisuma had commented how the spawn rate of fortresses had been decreased, so most of everyone was already dreading it.

"If only we could dupe items," Fit sighed over lunch.

"I don't know how that'd even work when there's no code to abuse," Sal winced.

Dream stared in silence from across the campfire, having been hit by a sudden realization.

There's no code.

Almost like the ding of a bell in a contest, the chat came to life with a new announcement:

*GeorgeNotFound has made the advancement [Diamonds!].*

\*\*\*

George was officially in love with the mineshaft under his island. A minecart had given him iron ingots and three (!!!) diamonds, and he had found more iron than what he knew to do with.

*GeorgeNotFound has made the advancement [Isn't it Iron Pick?].*

And now he had plenty of gold, too.

Now he only needed to find more diamonds and get some obsidian for the portal. He'd rather take forever mining it than risking pouring lava on himself trying to make it the efficient way.

If he found enough, he could maybe even make an enchantment table? Oh, but he didn't have leather.

The sound of rattling bones made him turn just in time to,

*GeorgeNotFound has made the advancement [Not Today, Thank You].*

As he dodged the next arrow in an attempt to get closer to the skeleton, he couldn't help but wonder how were the others faring.

Were they safe? Were they making progress? He hadn't seen anyone make the iron pick advancement yet, and that worried him a little.

At the very least, nobody he knew had died yet.

*donPeri fell from a high place while running from a zombie.*

The skeleton proofed out of existence and he gulped, catching his breath from the fight.

He hadn't jinxed it, had he? That was the fifteenth one, unless he'd missed any. That put the player population down to eighty-five.

He didn't like this.

\*\*\*

Roof over their heads, the base spent a minute in silence for the latest death announcement.

The fifteen who had died so far had all spawned on their own, and Dream tried to convince himself it didn't matter. It didn't matter that George was out there, possibly all alone; because he was strong! He was strong and smart and brilliant and beautiful and--!

"Dream."

Bad's voice snapped him from his thoughts, and he accepted the shield. They had deemed those to be the first priority over armor, since they were cheaper to make and negated all damage if used correctly.

"Thank you," he managed out, sounding far more somber than what he'd intended.

Bad seemed to take it as a reaction to the latest death, and did not comment on it. "They told me to tell you they've managed to corner a spider. Something you wanted to try?"

Dream blinked back to the present fully, his gaze landing on the entrance to the strip mine where the second shift was hard at work. "Yes," he mused, walking past Bad. "Thank you, I'll be right back."

\*\*\*

*Dream has made the advancement [Cruel Effectiveness].*

George tried not to smile at the chat, sitting on the grass inside his fort, his iron and gold smelting behind him.

Figures it would be Dream the one to have his same idea.

Every once in a while he would hit a moment of stillness in his busy day and his mind would inevitably wander to his friends, to how they were doing. He told himself they were in a group, they were good; skill in-game translated to skills in this new reality, so they were capable. They wouldn't die to a couple of mobs, would they? No, they were fine.

Even if they weren't, George couldn't afford to think about it. He had to focus on surviving. Thinking about his friends was the only reprieve he got from the stress of constantly working towards a set goal his life depended on – worrying over them and fearing for them would literally drive him mad sooner than the current situation of avoiding his concerns and swallowing them back down would.

So he tried to see the positives. So far none of them had died, and Dream had even made the same advancement George had discovered the first night.

He wondered what mob was it that he tried it with. Maybe a spider, like he'd done? How would you even 'fully loot' a zombie? Or a skeleton?

George contemplated the food in his inventory. It had been easy to catch fish earlier that morning, yes – the problem was he hadn't found any more. The sea around his island was a coral reef, so he didn't want to go too far out lest he end up punctured by pufferfish. There also weren't kelp plants nearby to gather from, as he'd hoped the day prior.

He had seven fried cod, and that was it. There were no seeds to get in the island, and hadn't found bread nor beetroot seeds in the minecart chest he came across. No trees had dropped apples, either.

For as much as he wanted to go find his friends, he didn't want to die of starvation at sea. Not to mention, he didn't even know *where* to go. They could've set up base literally anywhere and there would be no way for him to know where they went.

If they had spawned in a group as he'd sort of assumed then he'd suppose they'd want to go to somewhere the other players would think of going to, as well? But the problem was, Minecraft had no landmarks. One village could be any village, there was more than one stronghold, more than one desert temple--

Was there more than one woodland mansion? No, that was too much of a hassle – there's no way they'd risk storming one on the first day and without iron armor. Nevermind the fact they'd have to find it, first.

So there were no set landmarks, and since chat was disabled he couldn't ask for their coords.

...

Their coords.

Zero-zero.

George checked F3, looking at his own coords to see where he'd have to go in order to--

Ah.

He was far.

A hundred and fifty thousand blocks too far.

*HeyDylan was shot by a skeleton.*

But maybe that was for the best.



# the nether

## Chapter Notes

yeah i wasn't lying when i said this story was practically already done lmao  
so next chapter should be up tomorrow morning? as soon as i wake up, rn it's 6pm so  
do your math

anyway yeah thanks for the crazy support, and i hope you'll enjoy this chapter as well!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The morning of the third day, the base was once again split into several groups, each with their own tasks. A third of them would venture out in search for food, while the others would continue with the two shifts dedicated to strip-mining for iron.

Twenty-three people had died overnight, a long pending string of grim announcements that kept everyone from catching much sleep. Nearly half of them had died from creeper explosions, the rest an assortment of falling from a high place while running from a mob, or being shot down by skeletons.

That meant the total player population was now down to sixty-two.

Of which four, and only four, were of the original fifty that had spawned alone (those now in the base notwithstanding).

George, and three other players.

Dream hadn't been able to sleep much last night, the fear of not knowing how his friend was faring as the chat announced death after death after death after death--

It had been asphyxiating.

He knew, logically, that George was alive. That so long as his death announcement didn't pop up in the chat, he was still somewhere out there, surviving. Fighting. Making progress. If only to live through another night.

Logically, Dream knew this. He knew. But there was something in him that was *dying* to have even the smallest glimpse of how his friend was. He might be alive, but was he safe? Was he hungry? Was he hurt? Was he cold? Dream sure as hell was. There was coldness in the spaces where he couldn't hear his laughter after one of his shitty jokes. It was cold when the sun set and George wasn't there with him atop a tree. It was cold without his warm smile. It was cold without him.

Dream was afraid. He was afraid every breath he took would bring him closer to reading that *damned* announcement. He was afraid every night he went to try to sleep, wishing he could be helping George fend off mobs instead. To make sure he was safe. To make sure he was happy.

He was afraid, and he wondered if George was, too.

He only managed to shake the grim thoughts at around midday. They were in a forest in search of food, when,

*GeorgeNotFound has made the advancement [Ice Bucket Challenge].*

Dream smiled, being reminded of how far ahead his friend was from them when it came to progress in the game.

"I know it's not a competition, but I feel like we're being left behind," Tubbo commented upon reading the chat, chuckling quietly. They *were* in a forest, after all, they'd already had to fend off a couple of zombies.

"Watch him make an obsidian sword," Tommy joined in, scoffing with a smile. "He's gonna kill the dragon and we're still going to be mining for iron."

Dream made a hushing sound, grabbing the kids in front of him by the shoulders. "I think I see a skeleton up ahead."

The entire group went quiet, and they watched as the light gray spot in the distance walked around, stopping to look up at the trees.

Skeletons were a fucking menace.

From the corner of his eye, Dream watched Nestor at his side notch an arrow and pull the bowstring back.

*xNestorio has completed the challenge [Sniper Duel].*

\*\*\*

George spent almost the entirety of the third day down in the mineshaft. He went to fish early in the morning and managed to catch two more cods, but that was about it.

His hands were clammy from holding on to the diamond pickaxe for hours on end, and he was tired from constantly mining. His day had been productive, don't get him wrong – he'd found three more diamonds and lots of gold and iron.

The problem was that he was seriously considering it might be more worthwhile to build an entire

redstone contraption just to move the obsidian blocks into place instead of mining them.

It took *so long* to get a single block worth of the stuff, that George went back up to his fort at the end of the day with only three blocks of obsidian in his inventory.

Seven more to go.

*Ph1LzA has made the advancement [Isn't it Iron Pick?].*

George looked down at the chat and hummed.

Took them long enough. If they were in a big group, then they were probably gathering enough to make armour for everyone.

Only one of them getting the iron pick advancement meant they had probably found something that could only be mined with it.

Going by the lack of subsequent announcement, they'd probably found gold--

His train of thoughts was interrupted by a loud screech coming from the sky.

But George was ready.

All alone on the island, there was nothing to do but think about things. When he first got the achievement for fully looting that spider, he wondered just how would it be possible to fully loot other mobs. It appeared to only consider a part of their loot as valid, because he'd extracted no string from the spider while it was still alive – only its eyes. However, some mobs only dropped one relevant item upon death. Like, zombies could supposedly drop iron but it was so rare it hardly counted as loot from them.

So how would one fully loot a zombie? Was it done by cutting it up in pieces so that it... didn't die while you removed the rotten flesh? But it was already dead, so how would you keep it from... well, dying for real? The heart didn't work, did it? What counted as rotten flesh and what didn't?

How about skeletons, then? Their loot was bones and arrows; but they were made entirely of bones already! Were the arrows the ones that counted? Did fully looting a skeleton involve snatching its bow and quiver with arrows? Or did you have to disassemble it? At which point would it die if you did try to take all its bones for yourself--?

Like, George understood how to not kill the spider while also taking all its eyes, that was easy enough.

But what about other mobs? How did you extract gunpowder from creepers? Pearls from endermen?

The question that had stayed with him, however, was,

Which part of a phantom is the membrane? Is it the wings?

Would he be able to slow-fall without fail if he made a paraglider out of a phantom's skin? Did drops maintain their properties even if looted in this... *unorthodox* way? He didn't want to risk poisoning to find out by eating one of the spider's eyes, so he had no way to know.

Until now.

\*\*\*

As the phantoms screeched, flying over their base, the group sat around a bonfire (the building team had made chimneys for the campfires, bless them) and contemplated their options.

They had enough iron to make chest plates and boots for everyone, meaning they still needed several, *several* stacks of iron ingots more to fully deck out the entire group.

But they weren't gathered there for that.

The iron armor rush was but a baseline. If they wanted to survive, to gather food and resources without sending half the entire group for a relatively easy task; then they needed it. If only for their safety of mind.

What they hadn't yet stopped to decide on was: what next?

Would they gather every single resource they could find, bide their time, enchant, be full diamond – gather that new thing, what was it called? Netherite? Would they wait until they were full enchanted diamond to head into the Nether? And then wait until they were full enchanted Netherite before going to the End?

It would literally take forever. And no matter how resistant Netherite was, everyone seemed to suspect it wouldn't make much of a difference compared to iron. An arrow to the face would still kill them. A fireball or a creeper would still blow them up, regardless of if their armor survived or not. Stronger boots wouldn't keep their legs from breaking if they took a big fall, much less the rest of themselves. Better armor didn't increase their bodies' actual durability like it did in-game – here it only served to protect them from direct hits and save them from some cuts and some bruises.

So did it really matter?

"All we gotta do is not get hit, right?" Techno hummed.

"That's way easier said than done," Skeppy managed out a surprised chuckle.

The question was: were they ready?

They had been fighting spiders up until now, those who had gone out for food also having dealt with zombies and some skeletons in the forest – Dream had been there. But the reality was, they hadn't been doing much fighting. They were playing it very safe, especially considering their numbers. Taking out a spider between three people was much easier and less terrifying than doing it alone. Some were clearly more skilled at this than others, their abilities in-game translating into what they could do now.

But not all of them were like that. Not everyone could no-scope a skeleton from across the forest, like Dream had seen Nestor do; or take six zombies out with a pickaxe before they could even so much as touch you, like the mining team said Techno had done.

Not everyone was built like a demigod, like Calvin was (he'd been witness to it in the First Food Crusade™); and Dream had never in his life thought he'd ever see himself being so *agile*.

It just wasn't the case for everyone. And sure, while they had a lot of good players, it was still too small a group to brave the Nether.

The New Nether. Where gigantic boar-like beasts had been added, entire biomes had been changed, and fortresses had been made even rarer than before.

Not everyone was going to explore the Nether, some were going to remain in the base to look after it and keep gathering supplies – an effort Wilbur had already proclaimed he'd command. Dream knew he himself would be going down into hell with some of the others, but they hadn't stopped to decide just *who* would go and who wouldn't.

Even if there were already many a silent consensus on some. Dream, Techno, Sapnap, Fundy, Calvin, Nestor, Fit, Philza, Callum, Finnster, TapL, Skeppy, Bad; they were all probably going unless one of them had a reason not to. Xisuma, too, considering he was the one who knew the most about the update out of everyone.

Regardless, they were going to need gold. Whoever it was that went in, they all knew they couldn't risk anything.

And if that meant having to make golden helmets for those in the Nether team just so the piglins wouldn't aggro on sight, then so be it.

\*\*\*

George had been right.

A phantom's skin did give the effect the membrane possessed: slow falling.

He wasn't sure how it worked, but he wasn't about to question it.

He hadn't managed to make a paraglider, since he didn't have the string necessary to keep the sticks together; but he did make a cape of sorts.

Then he spent twenty minutes testing it by jumping from the little tower he'd made to better look at the ocean around him.

The cape was probably his most prized possession now, aside from his diamond axe.

He just had to keep his arms vaguely open to the sides, not even put much strength behind it, and it would work. It was like falling through thicker air – not thick enough to be a bother and feel like low gravity, but not thin enough to pass through like normal. It was beautiful. The only reason he 'tested' it so many times was because he needed an excuse to do it again. And again. And again.

And then another pack of phantoms swept down and he had to stop and fight them before eventually deciding to sleep.

The next two days went by in a similar blur.

He woke up, ate some fried cod, scouted the sea from his tower, and jumped off to continue with his day – any excuse to use his phantom cape. He did go fishing once and returned with five more cod to fry, so that was good.

Other than that, he would make a beeline for the bottom of his mineshaft and spend most of the day mindlessly hacking at the dumb dark blue blocks that took *forever* to break.

The only highlight of those two days was The Big Suit Up™ of the second day, where literally every single player bar three (yes, he counted) made the Suit Up advancement within the same span of a minute.

This practically confirmed George's suspicion of there being a big group, and he was glad to discover his friends were all there.

That meant it was only him and three other players who were all on their own.

He wasn't sure what to think of that, so he avoided thinking at all and waited for all of the advancements to pass by as he practiced stunts with his cape (dodging in the air, opening and closing his arms to cancel the effect and re-activate it mid-fall, things like that).

By the end of the Fifth Day – it sure felt like far more – of this new reality, he had enough obsidian to make a Nether portal.

So he went to sleep.

\*\*\*

As they all equipped their chest plates, leggings, and boots, the Team had reached an agreement: they would assemble the Nether Scout Party as soon as the first block of obsidian had been mined (they had enough diamonds for two pickaxes). Then, they would make golden helmets for them,

and begin preparations to start the incursion.

The three other missing players had followed in George's footsteps over the last two days and made the Ice Bucket Challenge advancement, meaning they were all headed for the Nether at almost the same time. As the Big Group, there was a general sense of responsibility for the other players, and nobody in the team wanted to enter the Nether only to find out they were too late and the last remaining players outside the group had all burned to death.

Dream didn't even want to *consider* the possibility.

So they were hurrying up.

The morning of the Sixth Day, they were having breakfast and splitting off in shifts to go mine when,

*GeorgeNotFound has made the advancement [We Need To Go Deeper].*

\*\*\*

George hated the whiplash of waking up at the fresh, chill, ass-crack of dawn to prepare for the Nether, only to walk into the suffocating, hot, pitch black darkness of literal hell.

Festive.

He immediately walked back out to prepare one last time, having gone in just to see what his spawn was like.

So he fit his golden helmet, fastened his cape, made sure he had everything he needed, and *then* walked back in for good.

George's Nether spawn was very nice: he was on a small hill against a wall of netherrack overlooking what was probably the not-blue fungus biome, the one with the tusked beasts – hoglins? Those.

The first thing he did was build a small cobblestone fort around his portal, trying to work as best he could under the oppressive heat of the place. When he had something he was content with, he placed a crafting bench and some furnaces inside and geared up to hunt.

He was sick of eating cod day in day out and he was *pretty sure* the hoglins dropped raw pork chop.

\*\*\*

The announcement of George having gone into the Nether far sooner than what everyone had expected made the Team hurry up. Those who weren't in the first mining shift held a meeting in the base, and those who were candidates for the scout party who *were* in the first shift were quick to trade spots with someone else.

"I think most of us already know who's going and who's staying," Wilbur began, writing down names with a stick on the dirt near the entrance to their mine (God forbid Eret or Grian caught them putting dirt inside the base they were trying to make a floor for out of diorite and andesite or something like that). "So I'm just going to list you guys, and if anyone wants out make sure to interrupt so I don't write you down," a pause as he finished underlining 'Nether Scout Party'. "Okay. Technoblade, Philza, Fundy, Dream, Sapnap, Bad, Skeppy, Fit, Callum, Finnster, TapL, Xisuma, Calvin, and Nestor."

"What about me?" Tommy chimed in, surprised.

"Do you want to go?" Wilbur turned to him, serious. Dream caught the worry in his eyes, and he understood. Tommy *was* much younger than them, but they also couldn't really stop him – not to mention, he was good. They needed good players for the mission.

"Of course I want to go," Tommy insisted, and Wilbur sighed. But 'Tommy' was added to the list anyway.

By the end of the meeting, the names Purpled, Sal, Tubbo, Sylvee, and Jack (L')Manifold were added as well.

Making the Nether Scout Party a twenty people group.

Nobody knew whether that was enough or not.

*The\_Eret has made the advancement [Ice Bucket Challenge].*

"We need to get golden helmets," Bad commented, looking up from the chat.

Except another announcement came in, and,

*GeorgeNotFound has made the advancement [The Perfect Fit].*

"Oh God, what did he do now?" Tommy mumbled, mock-complaint, as they all simultaneously



tried to get the advancement details up.

Once again, Philza beat them to it. "'Make leather gloves.' Wait..."

There was silence for a moment.

"We are so dumb," Wilbur chuckled in shame, pinching the bridge of his nose.

They had a fuck ton of leather, and everyone had been suffering from blisters for the past four days.

\*\*\*

*BadBoyHalo has made the advancement [The Perfect Fit].*

George couldn't say he was all that surprised by that, but it got a smile out of him nonetheless.

He had found piglins running from a pack of hoglins, and had helped them dispose of the beasts, so now he had plenty of pork cooking in the furnaces in front of him. As soon as the pack had been taken down, he began bartering with the piglins.

He got an obscene amount of leather and gravel from it. On the upside, he also got four pearls, some quartz, some obsidian, and Soul Speed III iron boots.

He'd made the gloves for one reason alone: the blazes.

He'd been thinking, was it possible to fully loot a blaze? The advancement description for getting a blaze rod was 'relieve a blaze of its rod', which was a strange way of wording things if you were to ask him. It sounded as if the rods weren't actually a part of the blaze itself, and instead something just stuck to their bodies.

After all, the rods seemed attached to the incorporeal body through magnetic attraction. So long as he didn't perturb the head, he had the feeling he could pull off the rods one by one.

But he wasn't about to try that with his bare hands, hence the idea to make gloves.

Food packed and shield and axe at the ready, George set out of his spawn area and headed towards zero-zero in the Nether. He couldn't risk the ocean in the Overworld, but if he was going to have to

travel around the Nether in search of the Fortress then he might as well head in the direction the others might start in.

It wasn't as if he had a better plan, anyway.

So he set out, wary, placing cobblestone blocks every once in a while to mark his path and *not* get lost. He'd also taken mental note of the coordinates of the portal, but he figured a trail would help him wonders.

\*\*\*

The rush to gather obsidian with the two diamond pickaxes they had took far longer than everyone would've liked. They had almost nine blocks by the time night came around and they were forced to reckon with the fact they *all* needed sleep.

*SurefireYumi has made the advancement [We Need To Go Deeper].*

Apparently, not everyone did.

"That makes the four of them down there in the Nether, those guys have no chill," Techno mused, poking the campfire with a stick.

"It's way easier to provide for just one person," Philza rationalized.

Dream supposed he shouldn't be surprised. Those four out there had managed to get through what about forty others hadn't: survive on their own. If they were still alive by now, then they were likely good enough to survive until the end.

But *they* were a group, and they were focused on keeping everyone in the Team alive. Mining at night was a big no-no, because apparently mobs ignored torchgrids and light while underground during the night and would spawn regardless. It was just too dangerous – everyone was silently and dreadfully aware of the fact the group that had had the misfortune of discovering this had survived the sudden zombie ambush solely because Techno had the reaction time of a God and had managed to take out half of them with his pickaxe before they could all get mauled to death, buying the others precious seconds to react and get their swords out to fight.

So they couldn't mine obsidian at night, and they would have to wait until dawn broke to gather the remaining blocks and head to the Nether to help out the four survivors.

Sadly, morning brought terrible news in the form of the three chat announcements they had all miraculously slept through.

*dungeon\_crawler\_94 has made the advancement [Those Were The Days].*

*dungeon\_crawler\_94 has made the advancement [War Pigs].*

*dungeon\_crawler\_94 burned to death while trying to escape a piglin.*

There were only three survivors now.

\*\*\*

George tried not to think about the latest death as he climbed down from the gigantic fungus he'd made a refuge of for a quick nap. He was *exhausted*, and his lungs burned with the exertion of breathing this terrible hot air for so long – at least he'd managed to get to a decent biome now, what with the blue tree-like fungus and the fairy forest vibe it had going on. It was also less oppressively smothering in there. His armor was heavy, his axe and shield even more. He'd been walking almost non-stop for... he didn't even know how long now, in a fairly straight line from his portal. And he wasn't even close to zero-zero!

He was sweating a river, George was sure he would be smelling absolutely *putrid* if it wasn't for the biome before this one, the one that had looked like if someone took the Giant's Causeway and threw it in hell. He was pretty sure those were called interlocking basalt columns, but his brain was partially fried by that point.

At least the absurd amount of ashes that'd fallen on him like snow back there had more or less made him smell like an ashtray. He was still covered in a layer of the stuff, it was gross. But he liked to think it was far better than smelling like a sweaty pig.

George didn't like the Nether, and that was probably an understatement. It was dark and hot and impossible to breathe in there. Everything was a dull, dead black or brown; and just when you thought you were getting used to the darkness you'd look down or to the distance and see the stupid bright ocean of smoldered gold that was the lava. It was too bright to look at, it made everything contrasting against it practically undecipherable from how dark it was, but it didn't light up enough of anything to help anyone navigate that hellscape. It was useless!

Needless to say, George hated it.

He was taking his tenth rest stop of the day at the foot of another big mushroom when the chat suddenly blared with life.

*Cxlvxn has made the advancement [We Need To Go Deeper].*

*Technoblade has made the advancement [We Need To Go Deeper].*

*Dream has made the advancement [We Need To Go Deeper].*

*Fit has made the advancement [We Need To Go Deeper].*

*Skeppy has made the advancement [We Need To Go Deeper].*

*Ph1LzA has made the advancement [We Need To Go Deeper].*

*Sapnap has made the advancement [We Need To Go Deeper].*

*BadBoyHalo has made the advancement [We Need To Go Deeper].*

*TommyInnit has made the advancement [We Need To Go Deeper].*

*Tubbo\_ has made the advancement [We Need To Go Deeper].*

*SeaPeeKay has made the advancement [We Need To Go Deeper].*

*sylvee\_ has made the advancement [We Need To Go Deeper].*

*xNestorio has made the advancement [We Need To Go Deeper].*

*TapL has made the advancement [We Need To Go Deeper].*

*F1NN5TER has made the advancement [We Need To Go Deeper].*

*Xisuma has made the advancement [We Need To Go Deeper].*

*Purpled has made the advancement [We Need To Go Deeper].*

*SalC1 has made the advancement [We Need To Go Deeper].*

*ItsFundy has made the advancement [We Need To Go Deeper].*

*Thunder1408 has made the advancement [We Need To Go Deeper].*

He counted twenty. Evidently, from the big group. Those twenty, plus the two other apparently solo players who had entered shortly after him – who he'd been mentally referring to as Yumi and Calisto.

Plus himself.

Twenty-three people in the Nether.

If George was to find anyone, now would be his chance.

the only reason why the 1.16 update happens much later in this story as opposed to irl is bc i wanted to include references to the second season of mcu and the dream smp l'manburg independence war.  
so yeah

techno taking down those zombies with a pickaxe and saving the mining team totally isn't a reference to the time he cleared mid in skywars with a pickaxe while talking about why his math teacher was bad or smth wym  
for the big techno simp that i am i write surprisingly little about him huh

i'll see you tomorrow morning!

# the fortress

## Chapter Notes

holy shit, thank y'all for the crazy support last chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"Okay, enlighten us," Fit mused, the carefree lilt to his voice strained with tenseness. "You're the snapshot updates guy."

There was a brief silence as the scout party stood in a defensive formation they'd hastily practiced a grand total of two times in the Overworld. Everyone had their weapons out, those with swords, axes, and shields making the outer ring of the circle while the archers stayed in the middle.

They were in an open space, having hurried up to make a defensive structure for their portal as soon as they stepped through. There was no lava in sight, the fire on the ground was *blue*, and the entire floor was godforsaken soul sand.

And they could hear the cries of a ghast somewhere in the distance.

"This must be the Soul Sand Valley," Xisuma informed, looking around, dead serious. "Skeletons and ghast spawn here."

"I already hate it," Fundy grimaced, a tight grip on his bow.

"I heard they had lowered the spawn rate of fortresses?" Tubbo asked from the side, his voice hushed.

"That's right," Xisuma nodded. "They also added this thing called soul soil-- I think it's that," he pointed to a darker spot on the soul sand. "That shouldn't slow us down."

"Let's get there and get out of here," Dream decided. "I don't want to deal with skeletons in soul sand."

With a general noise of shared sentiment, the group took a deep breath and began their trek through the soul sand.

Dream wondered where had George spawned in the Nether – not that he didn't wonder that in the Overworld, too, but this time it wasn't nearly as much curiosity as it was worry. The entire Nether was red. How did George see red when he couldn't? Was it a dark brown? It must be such a hassle to navigate this place for him.

Part of him hoped he wouldn't find the fortress before them.

As if to mock him, the chat came to life with an announcement.

*GeorgeNotFound has made the advancement [Those Were The Days].*

Dream was almost relieved it wasn't the fortress advancement.

Almost.

Because that was the exact same advancement that led to the latest death on the chat log.

Xisuma had explained to them that morning after everyone had read the bad news in the chat. Bastion remnants were these new structures that housed a lot of piglins – that was the advancement for entering one. The one that had followed was for looting a chest in one of those places, because doing so would immediately aggro all piglins in the vicinity.

Dream could only hope George wouldn't try the same thing they'd all clearly read that other player do.

As if George's petty spirit was trying to talk to him, the chat lit up again.

*GeorgeNotFound has made the advancement [War Pigs].*

The scout party stopped their advance, everyone staring at the chat with bated breath, waiting for an announcement they desperately wished wouldn't come.

Dream wanted to scream.

The reaction was short-lived, however, because not even five seconds later,

*GeorgeNotFound has made the advancement [Oh Shiny].*

"He's distracting them- That's the advancement for distracting a piglin with a golden item!" Xisuma exclaimed, quiet but excited for this turn of events.

*GeorgeNotFound has made the advancement [Cover Me With Diamonds].*

"Okay, now he's just flexing on us," Techno chuckled.

"Diamond armor is in the loot tables for the chests of some of the bastions," Xisuma informed.  
"But that's still very lucky."

They waited for a couple minutes more, but the death announcement never came.

And so they resumed their walk, but Dream felt as though he was walking on eggshells. The feeling of knowing *anything* could happen to his friend was squashing him, and it was even worse now that it felt as though he was closer than ever yet so far away at the same time.

But then,

*list\_o'\_calisto has made the advancement [A Terrible Fortress].*

"We need to hurry up," Tommy mumbled.

For once they found they all agreed with him.

\*\*\*

George felt very accomplished with himself as he ran through the blue fungi forest, far away from the bastion. He'd found lots of iron in the chests he opened, along with other useless crap. He almost didn't pick up the sword and the chest plate in there because he almost missed the fact they were diamond and not iron as he'd assumed at first glance. The chest plate was slightly nicked, but it was much better than his own armour.

He'd also grabbed the gold nuggets and golden boots and tossed them overhead to distract the piglins chasing after him.

By the time Calisto's fortress announcement appeared on chat, he was out of the bastion and away from the angry piglins. His cape had certainly helped with the escape, considering he jumped from the top of the bastion and didn't feel the slightest bit of pain as he landed on a mushroom and rolled over his shoulder.

He kept running, jumping over a gap like he knew he would land safely on the other side. He



placed a cobblestone block to keep marking his path, and only slowed down after making sure he'd put enough distance between him and the bastion to be safe.

He was carefully walking the edge of a cliff, two fifths of the way to zero-zero, when he heard the nightmare-inducing cry of a ghast attacking.

He pressed himself to the wall at his side on instinct, looking around hastily for a way out of the bad spot he was in, before noticing it was taking the fireball a second too long to hit him. Confused, he strained his sight in search for the ghast, and managed to spot it far in the distance.

It wasn't attacking him. It was attacking someone else.

And as he tried his best to tell what exactly he was looking at, he noticed the black looming silhouette in the distance was too thin to be another bastion.

Almost as if on cue,

*SurefireYumi has made the advancement [A Terrible Fortress].*

\*\*\*

"That's the second one- How are they so good?!" Fundy exclaimed, a whisper-yell.

The entire scout party shared the sentiment as they treaded through the damned soul sand. They'd fought an array of skeletons and ghastrs so far, and they couldn't even see their portal anymore – this biome was just massive.

They'd been in the Nether for far too long than they'd care to admit by the time they *finally* stepped onto netherrack. According to Xisuma, they were now in the old Nether biome, which was called the Nether wastes.

That's where they first found piglins.

"My people!" Technoblade celebrated, still relatively quiet and alert – ghastrs could come from anywhere, after all. "Oh, they're so beautiful, yes."

"We might not have time to barter with them," Philza pointed out.

"Yeah, we need to move pronto," Sapnap added. "We need to find the other three before something in the Fortress kills the two already there."

"We can barter on the way back," Fundy added, and Sapnap nodded to that.

Agreeing to do that after rescuing the solo players, the scout party continued with their advance through the wastes. They took turns bridging over the gaps, going two side-by-side at a time so that if one fell the other could catch them.

Death by fall damage *or* lava was the last thing any of them wanted.

They made their first rest stop at a small cave with glowstone over their heads, after what felt like hours upon hours of treading through sand and walking.

The Nether – Dream decided as they ate and let their limbs rest for a moment – sucked ass.

How had they not found the Fortress yet?!

And then, to *mock* him,

*GeorgeNotFound has made the advancement [A Terrible Fortress].*

"Dude, we're getting flexed on!" Skeppy complained.

"We need to hurry up," Sapnap stated, final, and everyone agreed by grabbing their weapons and falling into formation.

Dream wanted to scream.

\*\*\*

"Calisto *must* be on this same fortress, I'd bet anything on the fact the three of us had all been going to zero-zero," Yumi mumbled, decisive, and George hummed to that.

"If they did lower the spawn rates of fortresses then yeah, we might be on the same one," he agreed, carefully looking around from his crouching spot. "But this might be gigantic – unless they're like right around the corner, I wouldn't risk it."

"That's true..." Yumi clicked his tongue, clearly impatient.

George tried not to think about the fact that, had he taken longer to round the ocean of lava, the boy at his side would be nothing but a pile of items for him to pick up on the netherrack hills next to

the fortress.

He'd arrived to find him struggling against both a ghast and a wither skeleton that had followed him out of the fortress' long bridges and onto the hill. The only reason why George got the advancement so early was because he used one of the bridges to cut through and jump over a gap to get to the kid faster.

As it turned out, SurefireYumi (or just Yumi) was a *child*. He couldn't be older than Tubbo or Tommy! The kid was sixteen tops! George got legitimately *scared* when he noticed the silhouette struggling between shielding the attacks from the wither skeleton and taking out his bow to shoot the ghast was *small* – even smaller than himself!

How this kid had managed to get so far all on his own was either a miracle or a testament to his skills, probably a combination of both.

"We're in the right side of the fortress, though, right?" the kid looked at him, crouching by his side as they observed the wither skeletons patrol the nearest bridge. "Like, on the spawners' side."

"I'd think so, yeah," George squinted to try and see better. "But I can't see any spawners. We might want to surround the fortress until we find one, I don't think braving the bridges is a good idea."

"Yeah, I got hit by the wither skeleton – it was just a tiny cut on my arm but," he shuddered. "It wasn't nice. The wither effect isn't nice."

"Do you want some pork chops?" George offered, wincing. He didn't want to try the wither effect, no thank you.

"Thanks, but I'm good," Yumi smiled, returning his attention to the bridges. "I have cooked mutton and some regen suspicious stew."

With that, the two of them held their weapons tight and made their way across the netherrack hills, keeping their ears peeled for ghasts and their eyes open for wither skeletons. George made sure he walked in front, diamond axe and shield at the ready for anything that might come; while the kid held tight to his bow and dutifully followed after him, watching their backs.

On their way flanking the bridges, George explained his plan: blazes had long enough cooldown times between their attacks. His idea was to wait for one to attack, shield the incoming fireballs, and rush the blaze. With enough force, he should be able to just detach a rod from it.

If he could pull it off more than one, they could get a lot of rods from a single blaze.

The only problem was that doing this with multiple other blazes around would be troublesome, so their best shot was distracting one of them away from the group.

George gripped his axe hard and tried to convince himself that it would work.

It *had* to work.

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The scout party felt like they'd been walking for forever. They'd left behind the Nether wastes and entered what Xisuma said was a warped forest biome.

And they'd been walking around for *so long* that they'd literally already left it and entered the most annoying biome so far,

Fucking, basalt deltas.

Dream was *glad* he had a mask, he couldn't imagine getting all those ashes on his face – his eyes! Everyone else who had a mask they wore to the side of their heads to see better had turned them to the front as soon as an enderman came into view in the forest, and the ashes had kept them from taking them off again.

Needless to say, the party wasn't in a good mood.

And to top it all off, they had to traverse these stupid columns that went up and down seemingly at random while watching out for the magma slimes meandering about.

"I hate this, I hate this, I hate this, I hate this," Fundy chanted as he struggled to jump from one pillar to the other. They couldn't even afford to slow down because then the magma slimes would swarm them – they already had a bunch of them hopping behind them.

"Oh, I don't like this-- Ah!" Sylvee yelped, catching herself last second.

"This is such an annoying biome," Sapnap grumbled.

Dream stopped for a second to look back at the rest of the formation struggling to advance. He was having a breeze with it, and so were Tubbo, Fit, and Sal next to him.

"You guys need to hurry up," Tubbo pointed out, already taking out his bow to deal with the magma slimes catching up regardless.

"Shut up!" Tommy barked from where he was climbing up a pillar out of a lack of anywhere else to go. Bad landed atop the one he was climbing and stopped to help him up.

"You say it like it's easy," Sapnap huffed, making a long jump to another pillar. Dream thought for a second he might miss, but he didn't.

"I don't get it," Techno managed out, apparently tuning back into the conversation after having been focused on jumping from one pillar to another. He was doing surprisingly good, just not as fast as the four in front. "Like, I get why Dream's good at this, but since when are you three good at parkour?" he questioned, looking up for half a second before returning his eyes to the columns. Nobody had been able to catch his expression with the pig mask in the way, so that was kind of a waste.

"We're... not," Fit simply said, sharing a confused glance with Sal at his side, who just shrugged.

"Then why are you so good at this?!" Tommy insisted, nearly failing his next jump. Bad visibly had a near heart attack.

"Probably bedrock battlefields," was the unfaced, unified chorus of an answer that Tubbo, Fit, and Sal all got out at the exact same time with almost the exact same intonation.

Whatever retort Tommy was about to curse them with died in his throat at the sight of the chat coming to life.

*GeorgeNotFound has made the advancement [Into Fire].*

*SurefireYumi has made the advancement [Into Fire].*

"Why are these muffins so good?!" Bad questioned, half a surprised laugh off his chest.

"Wait- They got it at the same time – they might've met up," Skeppy commented, hurried.

Dream couldn't help but want to hope so. Even if it wasn't him, and even if that though made something ugly ache in his chest, he wanted George to be safe, above all. Having someone there to watch his back was all Dream could hope for at the moment.

He would get there. Soon he would get there, and then he would have the peace of mind of being the one to ensure his friend's safety.

\*\*\*

George and Yumi managed to get three rods off the blaze before it became a hassle and they ended up just killing it, obtaining another rod as loot. They made sure to split the rods between the two of them so as to not keep all their eggs in one basket, and retreated to the intersection room they'd closed off with netherrack, catching their breaths.

George swore his ears were ringing from just how many arguably-small-but-still-loud fireball explosions he'd heard go off mere meters from him.

He was tired. They'd managed to get four rods with only one blaze, but it felt as though they'd fought the two spawners simultaneously three times over. He gave himself a good pinch on the arm, the leather of his gloves singed and still warm from coming into direct contact with the blaze. He could feel himself drifting off, and pinched one last time. He had to be on the move soon, lest he'd start feeling tired again.

George knew, consciously, that they'd been in the game for less than two weeks now. But he felt as though he couldn't remember the last time he slept and felt rested after it. Sure, he'd managed to lose consciousness most nights and drift off to sleep on the bed of his fort on the island; but it wasn't enough. The tiredness clung to him, it was as though his limbs were shutting off and passing the torch to his brain. His thoughts wouldn't stop. He'd be half-asleep, body relaxing and regaining strength while his mind was wide awake, listening in to the sounds outside. To the distant gurgler in the ocean. To the occasional mob that crawled out of his mine. To every other noise in his island, because the palpable knowledge of the fact he was *alone* made him tense at anything not directly caused by himself. Constantly on-edge, unable to relax, knowing that everything and anything he did or didn't do or make was for and to his survival. Mobs? Only he could defend himself. Food? Only he could feed himself. Fear? Only he could yell inside his head loud enough to drown the wimpers out.

Anything to survive, the longest out of everyone, until he could manage to reunite with the others.

Or die of starvation at sea.

But now he was in the Nether, and he couldn't relax for even a second. He had a player to watch his back now, sure, but that also meant he had a back he had to watch out for as well. He knew he had to be extra alert, because those wither skeletons could sneak up on him when he least expected them. Everything was pitch black in there! The fortress, the skeletons, the land around it--

It was terrible.

*Soon* , he told himself. Soon he'd see the others.

Until then...

"You ready?" he asked, shield in hand.

"Yep!" Yumi nodded, dusting off his pants as he stood up. "Let's get another one."

"On my mark."

\*\*\*

"Uhh, guys?" Bad's voice broke them from their reverie as they helped the last ones get down from the edge of the basalt columns. They'd *finally* found the next biome. "I think I see someone coming here."

The entire party turned their attention to Bad, trying to see to where he was looking.

"I don't-" Skeppy began, squinting. "Where?"

"Over there, don't you see them?" was Bad's relatively calm reply as he pointed to somewhere ahead of them.

Most of those who'd donned their masks for the basalt delta pushed them to the side of their heads to see better, looking straight in the direction they were headed to.

There was, indeed, a person running towards them. Going by the fact it was only one, and they'd sort of assumed George and Surefire Yumi were together, then that could only be the other player.

The person appeared to notice them, because they began running faster. If their lack of screaming for help was anything to go by, though, they didn't seem to be in a rush.

By the time the player got to them, the scout party had managed to officially leave the basalt delta behind and were trying to dust off some of the ashes on their clothes.

The player turned out to be who they'd assumed would be: Calisto.

She'd apparently not explored the fortress upon finding it, instead marking down the coords and continuing on to zero-zero in the hopes she'd find them eventually. It was a smart move, really, and it meant they now had someone who could guide them all the way to the fortress so that they could help out the two lunatics who had somehow thought it'd be a good idea to storm it on their own.

They were quite a ways away from zero-zero, after all, it would be pitiful to turn back now if they couldn't find the damned thing like yesterday.

"It's not too far from here," Calisto provided, slightly out of breath but determined to run all the way back if need be. "If those two are still by the blaze spawners, then we need to hurry up – there's wither skeletons literally everywhere."

"I think they might've upped their spawn rate," Xisuma begrudgingly recalled, already dreading it.

"Fuck it, let's run," Tommy declared, taking off immediately in the direction Calisto had come from.

Knowing they wouldn't be able to stop him and also aware they had to move ASAP, the rest of the formation let out an array of annoyed huffs before booking it after Tommy, their guide rushing to catch up to him and lead the way.

Dream wanted to scream.

\*\*\*

George jumped over the netherrack block and immediately turned on his heels, alert. He waited for Yumi to jump in after him before blocking off the hole and sealing themselves away from the blazes into the intersection room.

They had three more rods. The both of them were frustrated because they knew they could've gotten another one, just like the first time; had the five other blazes by the spawn not started attacking them.

Whatever. They had seven rods, which meant fourteen units of blaze powder.

That was enough, right? They only needed about twelve eyes, maybe a couple more. The rods they had were *surely* enough.

Now they just needed the pearls.

"I have four pearls, how many do you have?" George asked, catching his breath. Four rods were in his inventory while the remaining three were on Yumi's.

"One, I aggroed an enderman by accident a couple of days ago," the boy informed.

"That's five between just you and me," George huffed, leaning his head on the Nether brick wall. "If the others can't get the rest, I'm retiring. My shoulders hurt from carrying this entire game."

Yumi laughed softly at that, exhausted from the fighting, and George let the sound brighten his mood slightly.

They'd done enough. He didn't want to go and loot the fortress – in the state he was in, that would just be suicide. Plus, the kid had said he'd seen an abnormal amount of wither skeletons on his small incursion in. George was not about to find out what getting hit by one felt like.

Now that he thought about it, he might not have taken a single point of damage so far. He was far too scared of the pain to brave battles head on and soldier through hits, so he relied heavily on his shield for defence and his axe to get rid of mobs as soon as possible.

That didn't mean he didn't feel battered all over from the hard task of keeping himself alive in this situation.

For all he knew, George would die in two hits of anything.

They rested for a moment, letting themselves relax the slightest bit in the relative safety of the intersection room. The next obvious step would be to head for zero-zero together and hope they bumped into the other group.

Their thoughts halted at the sound of a ghast passing by, and they remained dead silent, as if talking would attract it.



When it seemed to have moved on, Yumi spoke up.

"How come Calisto hasn't made the rod advancement yet?" he asked, confused, hushed.

George let that question sit for a little, thinking about it. It was strange, actually. Calisto had been the first one to find the fortress, right? Why had they not gone for the blaze spawners? Even if they somehow weren't in the same one, that would still... "Now that you mention it..." was what he hummed out, unsure of what to think of it.

"This must be the fortress they found, but they're not here," Yumi added, racking his brain over it.

What if they hadn't entered the fortress at all, just like George had at first? The advancement was triggered by stepping on the Nether bricks, but that could still mean, "they might've gone past this and continued on to zero-zero," George mused, pondering. "I think you and I are the odd ones out for tackling the spawners on our own."

Yumi seemed to think about it for a second. "That makes sense," he mused. "If they kept going then-- Oh! Maybe they found the others?"

"I hope so," George sighed, staring holes into the netherrack across the room from them, blocking one of the exits. "Because if they have, then that means--"

The cracked cry of a ghast far too near for comfort cut George's words short.

They heard the scream before the hit, and by the time the bricks under them were shaking from the impact, George had managed to pull Yumi away from the netherrack wall they were leaning against and to another one.

The wall that led to the bridges collapsed on itself, debris flying in all directions, and the expansive wave of the explosion smacked George and Yumi against the wall they ran for.

The intersection room was lit up by the flames resulting of the explosion, and they pried their eyes open towards the new hole to find the ghast approaching in the distance.

"I thought it'd left us?" Yumi questioned, the slightest bit panicked.

George opened his mouth to answer, only to notice a second ghast appearing far from the other, alerted by the ruckus. "Apparently it did," he bit out. "But not anymore."

\*\*\*

As it turned out, Calisto had been right – the fortress wasn't too far from where she found them. The scout party ran for a good while, crossing over a dingy bridge made of andesite that she'd probably built on her way to them.

They reached another Nether wastes biome and saw it in the distance: the Fortress.

It was massive.

"They were at the spawners before, but do you think they went to loot the fortress?" Sapnap asked as they ran through the up and down hills of netherack.

"You think they'd go in alone?" Tubbo questioned.

"They already went for the spawners alone!" Tommy pointed out, running at the head of the group with Calisto at his side. "They're crazy. I wouldn't be surprised if they went for the chests, too."

"Did you notice which part of the fortress you found?" Dream asked, having to raise his voice a little from where he was closing the formation at the end of the group.

"What? What do you mean?" Calisto shot him a confused glance over her shoulder.

"The fortress is split in two: the bridges with the spawners, and the hallways with the chests and the Nether wart," he explained, hurried. "Which one did you find? 'Cause you're leading us to that side and we might have to find a way around it."

"I don't- I don't know, I saw these black boxes in the distance and landed on the roof of one, that's how I got the advancement," Calisto shook her head no, pivoting not to run into a zombie pigman. "I don't know which side it was, sorry."

"That must be the chest's half of it, there's no roofs near the spawners," Sapnap rationalized.

Which meant they would be near the other two if they had in fact gone to loot the fortress.

But if they hadn't--

*SurefireYumi has completed the challenge [Return to Sender].*

Philza let out a whistle of awe before his brows furrowed in confusion when a thought came to him. "If they're fighting ghasts, I don't think they're *inside* the fortress."

"Then they must be on the bridges!" Tubbo realized.

"They're still by the spawners," Dream bit out, cursing their luck.

As the looming dark silhouette of the Fortress became clear over a sea of lava, the scout party took note of the architecture and confirmed that yes, Calisto had in fact found the loot section first.

Meaning they were on the wrong side.

\*\*\*

George tried not to curse as he helped Yumi up to the roof of the lava source block room, using his hands as stepping stone for the kid to jump on and cling to the bricks. He ran a string of colourful words in his mind as he barely felt the kid's boots leave his hold before he was reaching for his axe and shield, saving himself from the sword of a zombified pigman.

It had been such a dumb, *frustrating* mistake.

The ghastrs had nearly blown the intersection room to pieces by the time they reached an agreement on where to run to. Yumi managed to shoot down one while George was busy shielding the attacks from the blazes of the spawner less than ten meters away from them.

That's when a wither skeleton had sneaked up on him, deaf as he was from the remaining ghastr and the damned blazes. Yumi had shifted his focus to fending off the blazes as they moved towards the next best shelter: the division room, the one with the lava source block. George's diamond axe had gone through the wither skeleton's 'neck' so cleanly, that it ended up cutting off the jaw of the zombie pigman they had accidentally ran the wither skeleton into.

They had been too focused on avoiding the remaining ghastr, on dodging the fireballs from the blazes. Yumi hadn't been looking to where he'd been going, practically walking backwards, just keeping his shield up and making sure George behind him wouldn't die.

And George? George had been too desperate trying to fight the wither skeleton back. He couldn't see it enough, he couldn't hear it enough – he was fighting a deadly monster twice his size he couldn't even *risk* himself getting *grazed* by-- so he'd started pushing back with his shield, trying to back it into a corner, bide enough time to aim a clean hit of his axe.

He hadn't noticed the grey, dead-yellow zombified pigman roaming the bridges behind the skeleton.

As soon as George registered what he'd done, he'd stashed his axe away and yanked Yumi out of the scene like their lives depended on it. George's more than his', truthfully, because he'd been the one to hit the zombie pigman.

The scream it'd let out had been one unlike anything either of them had heard before.

He heard Yumi next to him notch an arrow and aim, George getting no breathing room from the climb to the roof before he had to brace his shield for the incoming blaze attacks.

"I got it!" Yumi celebrated, brief, his cheer almost drowned out by the agonizing shriek from the dying ghastr. "What now?"

George tried to come up with an answer, hiding behind his singed shield and shouldering the impact of fireball after fireball. The blazes were hovering over the almost destroyed intersection room, and George held back a grunt of effort.

"Get behind me!" he called, watching another round of attacks fly their way. He felt the kid take cover at his back and held tight to the shield.

"There's too many of them," Yumi cursed.

"And they're going to keep coming so long as we stay near the spawner," George huffed, keeping the pain in his shoulders as silent as possible. "Do you have blocks?"

"I have like four cobble," Yumi informed, an apologetic whine to his hurried voice.

George tried not to curse out loud. He couldn't check at the moment, but he was fairly certain he also didn't have much else. They couldn't make a decent enough cover with it. "Let's try to get rid of some of these blazes for now. Ready?"

"As ready as I'll ever be," Yumi gulped. "I, uh," he added, hushed, "I only have like thirty arrows left."

"We'll make them count," George assured, but whether it was for Yumi or himself, he didn't know-  
-

*TommyInnit has made the advancement [A Terrible Fortress].*

His eyes snapped to the chat in surprise.

*Sapnap has made the advancement [A Terrible Fortress].*

*ItsFundy has made the advancement [A Terrible Fortress].*

*Thunder1408 has made the advancement [A Terrible Fortress].*

As the announcements continued to roll in, George looked back up to the blazes.

"We *have* to make them count."

*Dream has made the advancement [A Terrible Fortress].*

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"I hear angry pigmen," Philza mused as they stood atop the very same roof Calisto jumped onto when she first found the Fortress.

"We need to hurry to the spawners," Dream decided, final. "We're going to have to go down there – let's keep the same formation as before."

"Do you use bows?" Philza turned to their guide.

Calisto brandished her iron sword, her expression grim and focused. "My aim is shit, sorry."

"Language," Bad chided from the side, and she ducked her head in apology.

"That's fine, you'll go melee, we need to watch our backs," Dream indicated, and she nodded.

Alert and with their weapons at the ready, the scout party dropped from one roof to another, taking the stairs down into the fortress proper. With Dream, Calvin, Sapnap, and Techno in the lead, they rushed through the corridors as fast as they could whilst still keeping the formation together.

They cleaved through wither skeleton after wither skeleton, pushing past zombie pigmen, running up and down stairs, cutting corners – it was a much bigger fortress than what they'd expected, and the sheer amount of wither skeletons they came across was astonishing. Every new Nether brick hallway was identical to the last, and they were tired and out of breath--

But they kept running, because they could hear a ghast start to cry at something, and it certainly wasn't them.

\*\*\*

George's mind was running a mile a minute as he heard his shield start to splinter slightly at the edges nearly on time with a ghast approaching their uncovered location.

Yumi had taken down a good four blazes, taking cover behind George's shield and risking major degree burns to come out to the side and shoot his bow at every brief pause of the onslaught of fireballs.

He'd taken down four, but George watched with increasing panic as more and more rose from the spawner and floated towards them.

The angry zombified pigmen were gathering at their feet, blindly swinging their swords at the wall in a futile attempt to get to George. They were congregating by the dozen, and even more kept finding their way there thanks to that... stupid psychic link thing they shared.

"We need to get out of here," Yumi mumbled, afraid, as he took cover behind George with a small whimper of fear. The fireballs flew around them, some hitting George's shield and pushing against

his sore body.

"I don't know where we'd go," George admitted, gritting his teeth. His shoulders were killing him, he was *not* made to resist against the impact of this many fireballs. "The pigmen would follow me everywhere."

"Yeah but--!" Yumi's retort was interrupted by the scream of a ghaſt attacking. He gasped, and yelled instead, "incoming!"

George snapped his head around in time to watch the massive fire blast get launched towards them. They threw themselves to the ſide, falling roughly on the bricks and feeling the expansive wave of the explosion push them around a little.

When it was over, they ſhot a glance at the edge where they previously ſtood, only to find part of the roof missing and a bunch of bricks ſcattered to the ſides.

George managed to pull up his ſhield and curl behind it, lying on the bricks as he was, and heard ſome of the fireballs from the relentless blazes paſs over them, while the others hit his ſhield.

Yumi reincorporated from where he'd curled up into a ball againſt his back, ſitting up and notching an arrow to deal with the ghaſt--

Except another arrow beat him to it, hitting the fire blast point black againſt the ghaſt's face.

As the mob shrieked and died, their eyes ſhot to the new announcement in chat,

*ItsFundy has completed the challenge [Return to Sender].*

"George!!"

George could've recognized that voice from across the entire Nether.

"We're up he--!"

His call was interrupted by a fireball landing on the bricks near them, and he barely had time to react and pull his ſhield up with him as he ſat up to cover Yumi.

George almoſt didn't catch the yelp of fear from the kid under the ſearing ſound of the fireballs flying around them. He felt the armor on his knees ſcrape againſt the bricks as he was pushed by the force of the attacks hitting his ſhield--

Until there was no ſhield.

The dry sound of the shield shattering into useless pieces was almost drowned by the screams of surprise that both him and Yumi let out, George instinctively turning his back to the blazes so he could cover the kid with his own body.

He had barely managed to put himself between the blazes' direct line of fire and Yumi when one of the fireballs impacted against his chestplate, ripping a choked scream of pain from his throat as the air was punched out of his lungs from the strength of the hit.

George felt as though he couldn't hear for a second, dazed, gasping for air in an effort to get his lungs to work again. He felt like a crunched plastic bottle, desperately filling air into himself to try and pop everything back into place.

"We're up here! Hurry!" he caught Yumi cry out, supporting him as best he could while pulling out his own shield at the same time.

George breathed in the hot, dense air like a man drowning, and looked around in time to see someone climb up onto the roof through the hole the ghastr had blown open.

\*\*\*

Dream heaved himself atop the Nether bricks, hurried, and nearly fell back down to the others upon taking in the scene before him:

George, stubbornly clinging on to consciousness with a singed impact mark on the back of his chestplate; and a kid no older than Tommy desperately positioning his shield to try and cover the both of them while also supporting George's trembling body.

Dream held tight to his shield and rushed to intercept the fireballs, arrows shooting from inside the room towards the blazes threatening them.

"How is it?!" Purpled asked, head poking through the hole to see them only to immediately duck under the trajectory of a fireball. He returned not a second after. "Technoblade is asking who angered his people!"

"Who hit the pigmen?" Dream translated, shooting the two behind him a quick glance, trying not to sound too imperative.

"He did, but it was an accident!" the kid defended George, panicked, having ditched his shield in favor of helping him to a- was that a suspicious stew?

"This isn't good- We can't take them back to the base if all the pigmen are going to follow us!" Dream turned to Purpled, holding tight to his shield. He heard a couple of blazes die, but so many more were spawning--

"I'm not--!" Purpled ducked back in to dodge another fireball, returning instantly. "I don't know- We can't just leave them here!"

"Of course not!" Dream almost barked, angry at the mere idea.

"Then I don't--!"

Purpled disappeared into the hole once more, the fireball following him in this time around. Dream tried not to roll his eyes in frustration.

"Portal- I can run to my portal while you guys go back, it's much closer to here than zero-zero is," George's hoarse voice drowned all his anger with worry. "I'm sure the pigmen won't stay aggroed forever, I could just--"

"You're not going anywhere on your own, you're hardly conscious!" the kid chided, just as worried.

"But if you take me with you, none of us will make it anywhere!" George argued, weak.

"I'm not leaving you, George!" Dream insisted, chancing a glance back at them before being forced to watch the incoming fireballs instead. "We didn't come all the way here just to leave without you!"

"Then what is your plan?! 'Cause we need to get out of here!" George challenged, exasperated.

Dream took some steps back under the force of the attacks and fastened his hold on his shield before looking back at the other two.

"I'm taking you to your portal," he decided, and the other two were surprised by that. "You won't make it on your own, and you also can't come with the rest so long as the pigmen are aggroed. Do you know the way back?"

George was silent for a second, catching his breath. "I left a trail of cobblestone."

"Wait, you guys aren't actually- That's too dangerous!" the kid seemed to freak out about it.

"Look- Dream's right, I won't make it on my own; this is the only way," George assured him, serious. The kid looked at him in stunned silence. "Go tell the others, they're probably down inside the room."

The kid looked between him and George for a moment, before taking out his bow and arrows. "Promise you'll be back."

"I will, I promise," George nodded.



The kid fixed him a determined look before lunging for the hole in the roof, a couple of fireballs flying past him as he practically threw himself inside.

Dream took another step back, using both hands to hold the shield. The blazes were falling under the arrows of the scout party, but they were still spawning faster than they could take them down.

They'd been just in time.

\*\*\*

George stood up with much effort. The regen suspicious stew had helped a lot, but he was still feeling pretty winded out and battered. He made sure he was taking cover behind Dream before speaking.

"If we die it's your fault, this is such a stupid plan," he muttered, tired, and the slightest bit afraid. The bad thing about having him there was that, if anything happened, George would have front seats to watch him die and lament for the rest of his life not having stopped it.

"You're the one who punched a pigman," was Dream's stupid cocky retort, and George wanted to punch him for pulling a smile out of him with something like that.

"Lucky for you I might have an idea," he admitted, looking around.

"That's new."

"Do you want to hear it or not??"

"Yeah- Sorry," Dream chuckled, and George hated how his mind cleared at that. He sobered up immediately, though. "What's your plan?"

"Can you carry me on your back and run?"

"Probably, yeah- with in-game skills translating and all that."

"Then you'll just have to trust me."

As fast as his trembling fingers would let him, George unclasped his cape from around his shoulders and reached up to drape it across Dream's back. He made sure it was secured before explaining his idea: with the phantom cape and his skills, Dream should be able to make the jump from that roof to the netherrack cliff a far to the side. George would hop on his back and then they'd just bank on Dream being able to outrun all pigmen as they made for George's portal.

"Hold up- phantom cape?" Dream was apparently still caught up on that, holding against the barrage of fireballs hitting his shield like it was nothing.

"On my mark," George ignored him in favor of getting out of there. He heard Dream reach with one arm to be ready to catch him in a piggy-back ride. "Ready...?"

They waited in silence for the next brief pause in the fireballs, and then,

"Now!"

\*\*\*

Dream felt George hit his back jumping, his legs shooting to wrap around his waist as his arms found whatever purchase there was on his shoulders. He managed to catch one of his thighs with his free hand as he pivoted to the side and ran to the edge of the roof.

He had no idea how this would even work, but he found with no small amount of surprise that he trusted his friend more than he probably should,

At least when it came to leaping over the abyss leading down to nothing but lava.

Dream tried not to scream as he stashed his shield in his inventory mid-air, his now-freed hand shooting to secure his hold of George clinging to his back with all of his might. He tried not to scream as some of the blaze's fireballs shot too close for comfort as they sailed through the air. He tried not to scream as he felt his jump impulse start to disappear nowhere near close to the cliff below them, even with their trajectory downward.

He tried not to scream as he only then registered the sheer *height* between the roof and the netherrack they were aiming for, and couldn't help but question for a split second if this had been a good idea to begin with.

That is, until he took notice of the fact... he wasn't falling as fast as he should. It was as though he was... floating down. But it wasn't as slow as one would think floating would be.

Had the air turned thicker? Was it the heat from the lava far below them?

"What?!" he exclaimed, feeling himself gracefully descend towards the relative safety of the cliff.

George behind him began to giggle in relief, a laugh bubbly with nerves that had no right sounding as good as it did so close to his ears. "Yes! It works!"

"What works??" he heard himself question, thoroughly bamboozled. "George, what is

happening?!"

"The phantom- The cape I gave you!" George explained, giddy. "It's made out of a phantom's skin, so it has the same slow-falling effect that phantom membrane has on potions! I just didn't know if it'd work with me on top!"

"Wait- You can make a slow-fall cape?!" Dream gaped. "That's sick! This is so useful!"

As they continued to sail down toward the netherrack, Dream watched the zombified piglins run to intercept them. Judging by the decrease in noise from up behind them, then the crowd had started to disperse in a search for ways to get to them.

Dream hit the ground running, absentmindedly registering George on his back shouting the direction for him to follow. He could *hear* the angry pigmen running after them, and it wasn't a nice feeling.

Not when he could see all the pigmen in his periphery aggro on sight and instantly lunge in to chase after them.

It wasn't pretty.

\*\*\*

George held tight to Dream's shoulder with one hand and to his axe with the other as they made their way through the netherrack. He kept an eye out for their surroundings, sometimes pointing out the next cobblestone block ahead for Dream to follow, but mostly to be ready to fend off any zombie pigmen that might get too close to them on accident.

They reached the blue fungal forest and ducked under the mushrooms as Dream deftly maneuvered around the place, the zombie piglins hot on their tails.

George caught sight of the dark mass of blackstone through gaps in the fungi. There was a good distance between them and that place, but that didn't mean he could let his guard down.

"That's the bastion I looted," he commented, hushed, catching glimpses of the structure from between the giant mushrooms.

"The one where you got your diamond chestplate?" Dream hummed, slightly out of breath from all the running. George placed a quick lid on the thoughts and feelings that surfaced with his tone.

"Yeah- I also found a diamond sword," he informed, deciding they'd left it behind and no piglins would go out to chase them now; so he focused on the front. "You can keep it, though – I'm not going to use it."

Dream let out a non-committal sound at that, and fastened his hold on his thighs as he jumped up a mushroom like it was nothing.

By the time they finally reached the small fort he'd built around his portal, George felt as though he was going to pass out from hypoxia. His mind was spinning from the heat and his lungs were killing him from where he still felt like a dented soda can.

He couldn't imagine how Dream was feeling after having ran all the way over to this place, while carrying him.

He slid down to stand on his own legs with much effort and they took a stance in the portal for it to take them back. Dream kept a steady hold on his shoulders, and George closed his eyes shut to keep the consciousness from spilling out, already feeling himself dizzy from the portal.

Just a little longer...

*Dream has completed the challenge [Subspace Bubble].*

## Chapter End Notes

yeah calisto and yumi are the reason why there's a named secondary characters tag lol sometimes you just need some extra characters and ocs are the only option, i hope you don't mind them,,,

anyway yeah, i think the next chapter should be up later today! and if i counted the pages right, it should be the last one!  
so stay tuned <3

## the end

### Chapter Notes

ayyy once again thank you so much for the mad support last chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Dream was a bit surprised by the sudden announcement in chat, which is why it took him a second to notice George wasn't standing straight.

He snapped back to attention when he realized the other was leaning forward, and managed to catch him before he could ragdoll onto the ground for good.

"George!" he exclaimed, worry pouring from his voice as he supported his friend's weight against him.

George made a pitiful attempt to stand on his own. "I'm fine, I'm- I just need some food," he managed out, holding his head with one hand and uselessly trying to push off Dream with the other.

"Tell me where you keep it, I'll help you," Dream stated, taking George's flailing arm and passing it over his shoulders to help him walk. He was exhausted, but he wasn't the one collapsing.

"I have it all with me, I just want to- I need to sit down for a second," George relented in his struggle and trailed along with Dream, nudging them towards the small cobblestone fort a couple of feet away from the portal.

Dream looked around for good at that moment, and discovered they were in a tiny island in the middle of nowhere, with only the fort, the portal, some growing saplings, and what looked like the entrance to a strip mine.

And a meticulous torchgrid.

Coupled with the advancement he'd just gotten, that meant George had spawned here, in this same island, *at least* fifty thousand blocks out.

Alone and isolated and with no guarantee of finding land in any direction.

And apparently with so little food he just carried it all in his inventory.

No wonder he hadn't made it to zero-zero, unlike a couple of other players.

The inside of the fort was just as barebones as the rest of the tiny island – but, then again, so was the Team's base, so he couldn't exactly judge. There was a crafting table, some furnaces, and a white bed to a corner. Going by the lack of sheep in the island, he supposed the wool had been crafted with string.

George took a careful seat on the edge of the bed, sat his goggles to the side, and rummaged through his inventory before producing a piece of cooked porkchop.

Dream sat down on the grass of the floor in a random spot of the fort and breathed in the fresh ocean breeze for a moment.

It was... peaceful. Calm. No land farther than what you could see, nowhere to be blindsided from.

Nothing. It was empty. It was quiet.

It was lonely.

Dream decided he didn't like it. Despite the safety of this isolation, he realized he much preferred being in the company of others. Even if mobs could ambush them from anywhere. Even it was loud and chaotic with everyone there.

At least it wasn't... this.

\*\*\*

Dream was mellow as he helped take his heavy armour off to rest, and George figured he was probably just tired from the Nether.

They didn't know exactly how long it would take the zombified piglins to de-aggro, but they decided to give it a day and check in after that. Regardless, the trip back in there would be a straight beeline for zero-zero. George knew the way from this portal to the fortress, and Dream knew the way from the fortress to the other portal. With any luck, it would be easy enough and they would be reconvening with the Team very soon.

For now, George focused on shedding his last piece of armor without falling asleep halfway.

When the diamond chestplate was set to the side of the bed, George looked up to find Dream standing in front of him, oddly quiet.

George didn't quite know what to say. The fact that he wasn't alone in his fort anymore was

difficult to comprehend. Dream was there. Dream was there! Dream! His friend, who had, up until now, always been an ocean away from him.

But now he was there, with that stupid mask on, looking like he'd been carrying a monumental weight on his shoulders until recently.

George sure hoped that was neither a literal weight nor himself.

"Tired?" he mumbled, exhausted, not having moved from where he'd sat on the edge of the bed. He wasn't sure his legs would hold him, and *he* hadn't been the one running all this time. His back still hurt from the hit, and his voice was slightly hoarse as a result.

Dream's shoulders slumped in defeat. "Yeah," he admitted, very much tired. "Yeah- no, I'm just..."

He trailed off with a sigh, standing still.

George reached up, stretching despite the pain on his back, both hands slowly extending towards the mask. With that in the way, he couldn't tell what Dream was feeling. He couldn't see his expression. Was he just tired, or was there something else?

Dream made no move to stop him, and so George slowly removed the paper plate mask from its spot.

Much to his worry, seeing Dream's face didn't help in deciphering what he was feeling, although it did tell him he wasn't just tired. His mouth was pressed in a thin line, and his eyes were heavy with both worry and relief simultaneously.

George placed the mask by his goggles and waited. There was clearly something troubling his friend, and if the standing silence was any indicator, then he was gathering his thoughts about it. George knew it was best to let Dream sort his feelings out first before pushing him into opening up.

Dream sighed.

"Can I-" he mumbled, swallowing half his words. "Can I hug you?"

George tried not to feel guilty as he opened his arms in invitation. Dream had asked. Dream wanted this. George wasn't pushing this onto him.

Yet with the knowledge his acceptance of the hug went beyond comforting his friend and into non-platonic territory, he couldn't help but feel as though he was somehow taking advantage of this show of vulnerability.

Dream enveloped him in his arms, leaning down, hiding his face in the crook of his neck. George let the warm feeling spread through his chest painfully as he returned the hug.

"I was afraid I'd lose you," Dream began, hushed, voice tight and disbelieving, as if George would disappear any minute now. "I was scared. I didn't want to look at chat and see your death announcement, but I also couldn't stomach missing it. Everyone else was there. All my friends, all the names I recognized from tab; they were all there. All except for you."

There was silence. George didn't know what to say.

"We realized quickly you and the others were all on your own. We were in a team, in a big group; and yet you were out there by yourself in this... this..." he continued, abandoning that particular line of thought with a sigh and a squeeze. George felt his heart tighten as well. "And there was nothing we could do. Nothing. We couldn't help. We could only wait for your name to appear in chat next to an advancement instead of a death sentence," he took a deep breath. "And then you went into the Nether. And looted that bastion, just like the last death had done. And then the Fortress. I'm..."

Dream squeezed him tighter, and George bit his lip.

He'd scared them.

"I'm sorry for worrying you," he managed out, guilty.

"You shouldn't apologize for that," Dream stated, serious. "You were doing your best. You were surviving. You-- Fuck," his voice cracked, and George felt his own breath hitch. "Thank you for surviving. Thank you for making it, George, thank you so much for staying alive. I- I don't-- I don't know what I would've done if you..."

George held his friend tightly, letting him sob quietly into his shoulder.

He felt like crying, too. As if everything up until now had been a wild haze. A trance. A hyperfocused tunnel vision set on keeping him alive and progressing,

and that only now that he finally felt *safe*, he was realizing just how terrifying it had been. How hard. How lonely.

George didn't know how to process his feelings. He didn't know what to do with the knowledge that Dream had been worried to the point of tears for him.



That he meant *that* much to him--

"I'm not going anywhere, Dream," he promised, quiet. "I wouldn't leave you-- all of you."

"I know," Dream chuckled, calming down a little. Oh, the sound was terrible next to his ear. "You're just that clingy."

George scoffed, glad to know he was feeling good enough to joke. "You mean I'm too good at the game to die, you idiot," he corrected, the insult far too gentle to bite.

Dream laughed, bubbly and soft with crying, but a laugh nonetheless. George decided not to fight the smile that crept up his face at the sound.

"You really are," he acquiesced. "You're the best. Lemme just call Mr. Beast so he can give you Techno's title."

"Okay, now you're just being a simp," George giggled.

Dream pulled back to look at him, cheeks rosy but eyes bright and shining. "Bro," he laughed, an intonation terribly reminiscent of Sapnap. "You literally discovered new advancements! You made a slow-fall cape!"

"I know, right? I'm so good," George just laughed along.

\*\*\*

They ended up sharing the bed because Dream refused to sleep on the grass and George was adamant about not wasting wood on crafting another one.

Dream tried not to think about George's small back pressed against his own throughout the night, and managed to get a surprisingly good rest.

Come morning, they prepared their things – George claiming his phantom cape back and giving Dream the diamond sword in return – and set out for the Nether once more.

They discovered with much relief that the zombified piglins had de-aggroed overnight, and had now gone back to ignoring them as they treaded through the hellscape. George led the way from his portal to the fortress – he was lucky Dream was good at parkour, because he had very much used the cape to get places Dream figured he otherwise wouldn't normally risk.

Once at the fortress, Dream captured George's hand to guide him in a mad dash around it and away from the blaze spawners.

He didn't let go as they reached the spot Calisto led the Team to and began to make their way towards the zero-zero portal.

George didn't make a move to free himself, either, and Dream tried not to grin like an idiot in love under his mask.

They reached the other portal in record time, and Dream had to begrudgingly let go of his friend's hand to make a hole in the cobblestone fort they'd erected around it to keep the obsidian safe.

Once inside, he blocked the entrance and they came to stand in the portal.

George smiled at him, giddy, and Dream wondered if he could tell he was smiling under the mask, too.

\*\*\*

Sapnap had been waiting for them on the other side.

The first thing George saw upon returning to the Overworld was their friend sitting on the grass a couple of meters away from the portal. As soon as he noticed they came through, he sprung to his feet and tackled George in a bear hug.

"George!!" Sapnap exclaimed, almost knocking George hard enough to send him tumbling backwards. Dream broke out laughing from where he stood to the side. "Georgie!! You're here!"

"I am, yes, stop being a baby," George couldn't help but chuckle, patting him on the back.

Sapnap's loudness and Dream's laughter prompted the rest of the Team to come out of the base to see what was happening. George didn't even *notice* the base to the side until after Sapnap (and Bad, who joined the hug as soon as he saw them) let go of him to let him breathe. Calisto and Yumi were also there, and with George now having arrived with Dream, that meant the entire remaining player population had come together at zero-zero.

"Now we just need to kill the dragon," Wilbur smiled, far and wide, as they gathered inside the base.

"But will that really let us out?" Skeppy asked. "Beating the game?"

"Do you have a better idea?" Techno deadpanned.

"Well, no, but..." Skeppy trailed off, unsure.

"It's literally the only lead we have; we just have to hope it works," Wilbur nodded, solemn.

And hope they did.

The search for the stronghold took almost an entire week – which meant that, by the time they found it, they had spent about half their time in that game just looking for the damned thing. Their eyes of ender broke twice, but they had been lucky with their piglin bartering and had enough to spare.

They had been digging around in several spots of the taiga biome when,

*Thunder1408 has made the advancement [Eye Spy].*

...And soon after, all sixty-one of them had made the same advancement. The reason why they had all gone out together this time was... well, there were two reasons.

One, and the one they talked through and rationalized, was that the way out of the game was probably through the final portal – the one that unlocks after killing the dragon and takes you to the... credits? To *that* conversation screen. So for all of them to get out, they *all* had to be there to jump in.

Second, and the one nobody really spoke out loud, was that... well, in the end, they were all just a bunch of nerds. Good or bad, the fact of the matter was they all liked to play this game. Nobody wanted to miss out on the final battle, even if they knew they were better off waiting in the secured portal room of the stronghold until the dragon was down and it was safe to come in. They had all helped, one way or another, to get everyone to that point.

And they didn't want to be left out of the end of it.

So they took extra care to get ready, shared a minute of silence for the fallen as they stared at the galaxy inside the activated portal, and jumped in.

\*\*\*

Dream didn't even look at the long list of announcements in chat, and neither did anyone else.

They all knew they'd gone through, so there was no longer a need to check chat to know how the others were.

Because they were all there.

The Nether Scout Party plus the three solo survivors took the forefront of the fight, while the good players that weren't in that group stood to the sidelines to watch out for endermen and dragon attacks and overall keep everyone safe. Some of the players who weren't confident in their battle skills took up their bows to aid in shooting the dragon down, while the others held food items at the ready to help anyone hurt go back to better shape.

They moved mostly as a single group, splitting in half if need be, with the scout party slightly off to the front to fight the giant dragon.

Which, mind you, Dream realized with both annoyance and horror was twice the size it was supposed to be and as dark as the end's lack of sky.

The fight lasted an entire hour.

Bowing it seemed to do nothing, the arrows more often than not being pushed back by the sheer power of the wings. It was hard to reach it with swords, let alone axes; and much like all other mobs, the dragon didn't behave in the same way it used to. It was far more aggressive, constantly rushing the perch and forcing them to scramble lest the purple breath catch them. They had to rely on the bow accuracy of Dream, Technoblade, Nestor, and SurefireYumi to take down the crystals atop the pillars, since approaching them was out of the question.

When the dragon was almost down, Dream turned to George, his back to the beast, and sheathed his sword to lace his fingers together in a steppingstone.

"Jump!" he commanded, rushed, loud over the roars and the battle around them. "Get the kill!"

He saw George hesitate for a second, before throwing his shield to the side and gripping his diamond axe with both hands.

He took a running start, and Dream breathed in.

George was catapulted into the air, over his head, toward the middle of the fight. Dream watched him cross the air with ease, probably thanks to that phantom cape, and aim the sharp axe towards the exposed neck of the dragon.

The diamond made a clean cut through the scales, the junction between two vertebrae, the flesh; and it was all so purple, purple, purple--

*GeorgeNotFound has made the advancement [Free the End].*

\*\*\*

George tumbled haphazardly over the endstone after cleaving through the dragon's neck, and the only thing he could hear for a moment was the cracked booming noise of the dragon dying.

Then the uproar of the others filtered in, and he managed to get his sense of hearing back just in time to hear Dream and Sapnap shout his name as they collided into him and knocked the air out of his lungs.

Then Tommy and Tubbo tackled them, and Wilbur, Eret, and Yumi followed suit.

George laughed, not sure he could do much else at the moment, as he felt a bunch of people press into the group hug yet he could only focus on Dream's arms around him.

They had won.

The celebration lasted a good five minutes before they assembled around the portal under the perch. Nobody knew quite what to expect. If it didn't work, then... it was just best not to think about it for now.

But if it did work, what would they find on the other side? Had they been missing for these past two weeks? Had they gone into a coma? Was this all a dream? Would they remember?

Had the other thirty-nine players... really died?

Only one way to find out.

\*\*\*

They did remember.

They hadn't been missing.

The Mojang team had no idea what had been happening, the internet was losing its marbles over the whole ordeal, and the fucking *Governments* had gotten involved in trying to track down what they had managed to discover was a criminal organization--

Dream tried not to think about it too much. It felt like being absent for a day at school and

everything interesting happening all at once while you were away specifically.

He didn't have much time to think it over at first, when he woke up in a hospital and when his family didn't leave him alone for the next three days.

The thirty-nine players who had died in-game had woken up upon death from the coma-like state they'd all been in over the last two weeks, which was a huge relief.

Although apparently they were all undergoing therapy to try and cope with having experienced death in an assortment of painful ways.

What was more, Mojang had managed to gain access to the chat log about four hours into the crisis officially began, so everyone and their mothers had been tracking the player's progress through the advancements in much the same way they themselves had done for the other players outside the Team.

It was mind-boggling.

Every single one of the hundred players had grown substantially in popularity, and they were all the talk of the day.

For several days.

About a week after winning the game, Wilbur managed to get a hold of everyone, and made a discord server to settle when to organize an IRL meetup.

Another week after that, and Dream was flying out to London with his family to see the other ninety-nine players.

George made him a paper plate mask, exactly the same one he'd worn those two weeks inside the game, to wear for when the meetup went live.

And the meetup almost went live while Dream was still hugging him, much to George's dismay.

But George didn't exactly try to move away, either, and when Wilbur started streaming the meetup Sapnap managed to get into the frame and catch them in a hug before it could become obvious.

Although Twitter clipped it and slowed it down and didn't shut up about it for the following days.

Dream couldn't help but laugh as he scrolled through the fans freaking out about how they were already hugging before Sapnap tackled them, and wondered how they'd react if they knew what happened after the meetup was over and the groups went their separate ways.

He looked down at George's head on his shoulder as they sat on the couch of his house and decided he should probably let them calm down first.

Although... he did enjoy creating chaos...

He took a picture of their hands intertwined between them and posted it to Twitter with the caption: 'Zombie piglin horde escapees find refuge in eachother, 2020, colorized.'

He tagged George in it, locked his phone, and let the chaos unfold with a smile.

"You're a psychopath, you know that?" George chided, but there was no bite to his tone.

"But they *did*, didn't they?" he teased, grinning.

"I suppose," George smiled, snuggling closer.

Dream supposed so, too.

## Chapter End Notes

so yeah! that's the fic for ya!

i'm not good at writing the endings to stories so i hope that was good!

anyway yeah uhhhhhhhh have a nice day/night, thank you so much for reading, ily all  
<3 <3 <3

## End Notes

thank you for reading <3

Works inspired by this one: [What If We All Played Minecraft?](#) by [Kikyo2022](#), [Naestern](#) by [Lyo\\_Mira](#)

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